THE WHISPERING·GALLERY

In Which We Learn From Vilhjalmur Stefansson That the Literary Men Have Been Spoofing Us About the Arctic Circle.

By DONALD ADAMS.

WE opened Stefansson's "The Friendly Arctic" just as the Christmas cold wave struck the city. It took more than the title to reassure us as we came in shivering from a wind that blew into Broadway straight from Medicine Hat. We considered this title of Mr. Stefansson's to be a mild pleasantry of his at first. And then, as we grew warmer, and read on into the book, we discovered to our amazement that he was trying to convince us that all we had ever read about the silence and the fearful cold and the absence of animate things was nothing more than the purest tosh.

The dirty Eskimos, whom we had pitied since a child, were really, we learned, a jolly lot of people for whom existence is hardly more exacting than it is for the natives of the Filbert Islands.

We found Mr. Stefansson eagerly endeavoring to clear his reader's mind of all the popular conceptions of the frozen circle. He is particularly insistent that we should realize how noisy the Arctic really can be.

"Nothing," he writes, "is more characteristic of the Arctic as it has been imagined to be than its silence. But it will appear just how silent a summer must be where the air is continually filled with the hum of the bluebottle fly, ubiquitously waiting to deposit its larvæ, and the buzz of the mosquitoes, hovering in clouds to suck the blood of man or beast. There are the characteristic cries of the plovers and the snipes and the various sandpipers and smaller birds, the squawking of ducks, the cackling of geese, and the louder though rarer cries of the crane and the swan. And especially the night is resonant (if you are 'of a nervous temperament' you will say hideous) with the screaming of loons, in its nature somewhere between the scream of a demented woman and the yowling of cats on a back fence. . . . The treeless plains of North Dakota when I was a boy were far more silent than ever the Arctic has been in my experience.

"When the ice is being piled against a polar coast there is a high pitched screeching as one cake slides over the other, like the thousand times magnified creaking of a rusty hinge. There is the crashing when cakes as big as a stone wall, after being tilted on edge, finally pass beyond their equilibrium and topple down upon the ice; and when extensive floes, perhaps six or more feet in thickness, gradually bend under the resistless pressure of the pack until they buckle up and snap there is a groaning as of supergiants in torment and a booming which at a distance of a mile or two sounds like a cannonade.

"'The eternal polar silence,' writes the poet in his London attic." (Here we pause to insert that the explorer appears to have as quaint and romantic a notion of the poet as he says the poet has of the explorer.) "But Shackleton's men, as quoted in his book 'South,' now and again commence their diary entries with the words 'din, din, DIN.' Robert Service, some distance south of the Arctic Circle in a small house in the city of Dawson, wrote much of the Arctic silence. But we of the far north never forget the boom and screech and roar of the polar pack."

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The greatest shock we expect to experience in a bookshop will come when we pick up a book on polar exploration which is less than three inches thick. We used to think that the size of these volumes was the natural result of continued isolation in those empty, silent spaces, the illusion of which Mr. Stefansson shatters. We supposed the explorer set down everything he thought of in his notebook in order to keep from biting himself for food.

We are assured by Mr. Stefansson, however, that if one has no objection to eating meat three times a day all the year round, and nothing else, it is possible to live off the Arctic country. That is what he did in the expedition of 1913-1918, of which this book tells the story

Although "The Friendly Arctic" is as long as other books of its kind, it's worth exploration from cover to cover. We mean to do as much.

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The Prohibition Joke.

WE realize that most of the humor that has been evolved from prohibition has grown as flat and stale as last night's beer. The common or garden variety of prohibition joke is about as precious a bloom as the dandelion. But we have a remedy for all that. We have found the man who could make us laugh so much at ourselves in connection with the Eighteenth Amendment that we can think of no better way of beginning the new year than to bring the English comic artist, H. M. Bateman, over here to sketch the ardors of our conflict with the Demon Rum.

From turning the pages of Mr. Bateman's "A Book of Drawings" we are convinced it is one of the most amusing books we have seen in years. It has often been said that the basis of American humor is exaggeration. If that be so, Mr. Bateman's satire is American rather than English.

But we are not really concerned about that. For all we know Mr. Bateman may derive his slant from the Assyrians or the blond Eskimos. Whatever its source, it is riotously funny.

As earnest of what this artist could do for us, we refer you to his drawings of "The Boy Who Breathed on the Glass in the British Museum." It is impossible for us to convey the skill with which Mr. Bateman depicts changes in facial expression. It would be as difficult to diagram the art of Chaplin.

A gawky boy presses close to the glass cover of a mummy case, breathing upon it with wide open mouth. An attendant with a face like a Tyburn rogue steals up and pinions him. The boy is tried before an immense assemblage and jailed. He grows old and toothless in prison, and upon his release totters back to the museum and keeps on breathing just long enough to cloud the surface of the mummy case before he dies.

G. K. C. Again.

G. K. CHESTERTON has written an introduction to the book which we wish we could quote entire.

"It is well," he says, "that a draftsman with the wild exactitude of Mr. Bateman should enjoy one riot of ridiculing modern society before modern society becomes too ridiculous to be ridiculed. For that is the chief danger at present to this branch of art. . . .

"It is sometimes said that we have no satirists as great as Rabelais or Swift, but satire of that strength depends on a sanity and even sobriety in real things. The imaginative effect of Rabelais owes much to the old medieval and monastic setting at which he mocked; and Swift's wildcat fancies can be seen more clearly against the background of clipped hedges and trim gardens in which Queen Anne took her tea. . . .

"Suppose Swift, on walking stiffly up to Queen Anne's tea party, had found it was the Mad Tea Party. Suppose that Anne, like Alice, was already dining with the March Hare, the Mad Hatter and the Dormouse. That is the disconcerting situation in which a satirist finds himself nowadays."

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The Mad Tea Party.

WE are not so sure as we read over these remarks of Mr. Chesterton's that he did not set them down while his tongue was firmly pressed against his cheek. His statement about modern society becoming too ridiculous to be ridiculed has the authentic Chestertonian crackle about it, but we fear it may be just fireworks.

After all, wasn't it when chivalry and the ethics of knighthood had become useless growths in a world in which the seeds of a new social system were taking root that Don Quixote tilted against windmills? Cervantes would never have written his book while the feudal system was the established system, believed in by the average man as whole heartedly as John Jones believes in the Constitution.

And if modern society is becoming increasingly ridiculous, as Mr. Chesterton assures us it is, modern literature and art are becoming increasingly satiric, increasingly humorous. Mr. Chesterton cries out that this literature and art are going through fantastic contortions in an effort to keep up with the conditions they depict. We are willing to place our bet on the satirists. We believe this country can produce a serviceable Cervantes for every Mad Tea Party that we have.

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"The Open Sea."

EDGAR LEE MASTERS'S new book, "The Open Sea," is a heavy disappointment. Half of it is given to an elaborate treatment of the Brutus theme, beginning with Brutus himself, then jumping to Charlotte Corday, and ending with "Booth's Philippi," at Garrett's tobacco house in Virginia, where Lincoln's assassin was trapped.

The idea is well enough. Masters sees these three figures as zealots, fanatical in their blows for what they believed to be liberty. His conception of their characters has interest, but the verse in which these pieces are written is for the most part exceedingly poor. Mr. Masters apparently possesses no critical instinct for his own work. At least, that is the most charitable interpretation which can be given for his publishing such stuff as this. There are lines and lines of hobbled blank verse, and pages of pure doggerel.

Here is Lincoln debating with himself over the threatened secession:

"The country is at peace.
You do not dare to ask your Congress
for
Troops on the Southern people to
make war."

And this:

'But if I don't, mad Treason will have
gained
Such progress that it will have quite
attained
Its purpose to bind down and overawe
Conciliation or resistance even."

The volume contains his excellent "Monody on the Death of William Marion Reedy," but little else of value.

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Another Broxopp.

PARTICULARLY if you have been to see A. A. Milne's comedy, "The Great Broxopp," and found it amusing, as we did, you will enjoy "Peter Binney," by Archibald Marshall, which has just made its first appearance in this country, though it was published in England more than twenty years ago. Broxopp promoted beans for babies. Binney's heart was in food for poultry. Broxopp gave up his business and his name in order that his son, just down from Oxford, might marry the daughter of a titled man.

But not Binney. Peter Binney at 45, with his business well in hand, his education sketchy, decides to go up to Cambridge with his son, Lucius, and enroll with him as a student at Trinity. Binney, Sr., gets into more difficulties with the dean than his son, and his escapades make a pleasing tale, to be taken without a grain of seriousness

Hungarian Prince Defends Charles

MY MEMOIRS. By Prince Ludwig Windischgraetz. Translated by Constance Vesey. Houghton Mifflin Company.

THOSE who have been following the fortunes of Central Europe in the newspapers of recent date, more particularly the spectacular attempt of the ex-Emperor of Hungary to regain his throne by flying from Switzerland to Hungary in an airplane, will do well to read "My Memoirs," written by the man who was Hungarian Food Minister during the late war and who during the latter part of the time was the close personal friend and adviser of Emperor Karl, or Charles.

Dedicated "to those who will reconstruct Hungary and Austria," the Prince's book opens with a foreword describing his forced sojourn in Switzerland after having gone there as the head of a section in the Hungarian Foreign Office. When the Hungarian revolution took place he was reduced to the status of a private individual.

Failing in his attempt to secure the ear of the people whose cause he had championed, he decided to write and publish his memoirs, supplemented by memoranda made in his diary during the war, and let Hungary and all the world know the truth. Descended from several generations of soldiers, he has the fearlessness of the soldier. As you read his story you feel that he is telling the truth.

As Food Minister, Windischgraetz came into close relations with Charles. He declares that the King was merely a pawn in the game. Count Andrassy is the only member of the court that won this author's approval. The Count was Minister of Foreign Relations and father-in-law of Karolyi, Prime Minister of Hungary

His arraignment of the Hungarian supreme command and his bitter sarcasm over the thousands of wasted lives and money recklessly spent on supposedly needed fortifications and war works are not unlike comments that we have read on our own Government during the war! But there is more than sarcasm in it; there is grief and chagrin. Prince Windischgraetz seems to have at heart the good of the Hungarian people.

Referring to Charles, the author says: "I have spoken to the King. He realizes his position and bears his fate with dignity. No one can blame him for not believing that his expulsion expressed unbiassed public opinion, or for feeling that his views had been misunderstood. He is surely justified in assuming that his real wishes were not represented to his peoples in the right light. I told him the plain, unvarnished truth now, as I had always done during my term of office. Neither the dynasty nor the person of the monarch can play any decisive part, in themselves alone, in the lives of the nations at a time of such absolute débâcle. Will Hungary, will Austria exist? That is the sole problem today. Austria-Hungary could exist because this confederacy was never at any time an empty formality; on the contrary, it was a necessity, it was an organic coalescence.

"It is idle to prophesy or to indulge in speculation with regard to the form of State; useless and harmful to try and exercise any influence or force from without. It is foolish to carry on monarchist propaganda outside the frontiers; all propaganda must be in the heart and mind, consequently, within the frontiers.

"If the leading classes, who are responsible for Austria-Hungary's political and military downfall, had been in the trenches, the struggle would have been decided against us in a few weeks . . ." That they (the common soldiers) were not mastered by their opponents within a very few weeks "proves the existence of a latent energy in the people which alone counts in the work of reconstruction. Healthy evolution must bring those elements into power, in the countries of the former Danube monarchy, to which we owe what was actually achieved during the years of war. . . . The revolution has fallen to the ground, has been a somersault; the cataclysm overthrew a throne indeed, but it has not changed the inmost character of those who brought it about. This change is essential."

EDITH ADAMS BROWN

Why Is the Tired Business Man

"The problem as I see it is this——"

OF ALL THINGS! By Robert Benchley. Illustrated by Gluyas Williams. Henry Holt & Co.

SOLEMNITY is the first duty of civilized man. Other writers may sometimes forget this. Mr. Benchley never does. The passionate seriousness evidenced in his "first book" presages better days for American literature. Realizing that a mistaken sense of humor and a disregard of the real and concrete matters of life are gnawing at the root of our national development, this earnest and responsible author has gathered together several valuable observations upon contemporary customs in a charming philosophical volume dedicated to Henry Bessemer in recognition of his seldom remembered yet mighty contribution to American letters—the Bessemer steel converter.

Equally telling is the preface in which Mr. Benchley reminds his readers that "all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. . . . The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world." Thus stirringly ends the preface, signed modestly, "R. C. B., 'The Rookery,' Brenning Downs, Wippet-cum-Twyne, New York City, August 24, 1921."

"The Social Life of the Newt" is an absorbing study of the *tempora* and *mores* of a neglected race; "Thoughts on Fuel Saving," publication of which was doubtless deferred by the publishers until after the war as being too keenly cooperative with the Fuel Administration. "The Community Masque as a Substitute for War," a timely hint to the promoters of the limitation of armaments; "The Passing of the Orthodox Paradox," "A Little Debit in Your Tonneau" and "Coffee, Megg and Ilk, Please," all of which are fascinating in their revelation of the minutiæ of Mr. Benchley's researches.

Perhaps nothing illustrates this attention to detail so clearly as the illuminating survey of the business world in "From Nine to Five." The poignant picture of a day in the life of a typical 100.01 per cent. American thrills the reader to the vertebræ, especially in the paragraphs which follow:

"When the mail is disposed of we have what is known as Memorandum Hour. During this period every one sends memoranda to every one else. If you happen to have nothing in particular about which to dictate a memorandum, you dictate a memorandum to some one, saying that you have nothing to suggest or report. This gives a stimulating exchange of ideas and also helps to use up the blue memorandum blanks which have been printed at some expense for just that purpose.

"As an example of how this system works I will give a typical instance of its procedure. My partner, let us say, comes in and sits down at the desk opposite me. I observe that his scarfpin is working its way out from his tie. I call a stenographer and say, 'Take a memo to Mr. MacFurdle, please. *In re* Loosened Scarfpin. You are losing your scarfpin.'

"As soon as she has typed this it is given to Mr. MacFurdle's secretary, and a carbon copy is put in the files. Mr. MacFurdle, on receiving my memo, adjusts his scarfpin and calls his secretary. 'A memo to Mr. Benchley, please. *In re* Tightened Scarfpin. Thank you. I have given the matter my attention.'

"As soon as I have received a copy of this typewritten reply to my memorandum we nod pleasantly to each other and go on with our work. In all not more than half an hour has been consumed, and we have a complete record of the negotiations in our files in case any question should ever arise concerning them. In case *no* question should ever arise, we still have the complete record. So we can't lose—unless you want to call that half hour a loss."

Clearly Mr. Benchley has that finer perception of business which is so frequently lacking in contemporary men of letters. Even in the business of homekeeping he has developed an acumen worthy of contemplation and of imitation. Nothing could be more revolutionary than his theories upon the subject of household accounts in the essay on "Turning Over a New Leaf." They may be of practical advantage to many readers, especially in the suggestions contained at the close:

"By way of outlining beforehand just what you can spend on this and that (and it is usually on 'that') it might be well to take another family with a representative income. Let us say that there are four in the family and that the income is about $1,000 per year too small. If such a family would sit down some evening and draw a chart showing father's earning capacity with one red line and the family spending capacity with one black line . . .

"There is one little technical point that the amateur accountant will do well to remember. It gives a distinction to the page and shows that you are acquainted with bookkeeping lore. It is this: Label your debit column 'credits' and your credit column 'debits.' You might think that what you receive into the exchequer would be credited and your expenses debited, but that is where you miss the whole theory of practical accounting. That would be too simple to be efficient. You must wax transcendental and say, 'I, as an individual entity, am nothing. Everything is all; all is everything.' There is a transcendent Account, to which all other accounts are responsible, and hence money turned over to the Cinnamon Account is not credited to that account, but rather debited to it, for Cinnamon hereby assumes the responsibility for the sum. As money is spent for Cinnamon, its account is credited, for it is relieved of that responsibility. Don't start wondering where the responsibility finally settles or you will throw something out of its stride in your brain.

"Some people profess to scoff at the introduction of bookkeeping into the running of the household. It is simply because they never tasted the fascination of the thing.

"The advantage of keeping family accounts is clear. If you do not keep them you are uneasily aware of the fact that you are spending more than you are earning. If you do keep them you *know it.*"

Seldom are first books as promising as this of Mr. Benchley's. The diversity of his knowledge is perhaps equaled only by the Encyclopedia Britannica, which, indeed, he accredits with much of the responsibility for his erudition—in chapter XVI.—with a touching tribute to its versatility and comparatively low cost. The illustrations by Gluyas Williams are worthy of their subjects—than which could be written no more fulsome praise.

CORNELIA P. LATHROP.

International Trade Is Too Restricted

AMERICA AND THE BALANCE SHEET OF EUROPE. By John F. Bass and Harold G. Moulton. New York: The Ronald Press Company.

"THE duration of the business depression which now holds the world in its thrall is conceded to be one of the most vital economic—and political—issues in the world to-day. It is a paramount economic issue because upon business recovery depends the material wellbeing, one may almost say the very existence, of many millions of people. It is a paramount political issue because without a return of prosperity many existing European Governments will sooner or later succumb under the financial strain to which they are now being subjected. In view of the enormous significance of the problem a thoroughgoing analysis of the factors involved in the present industrial and financial situation is required."

This statement, made by Mr. Bass and Prof. Moulton in their volume on "America and the Balance Sheet of Europe," shows in its few words the problem that induced them to write this very important and striking contribution to international economic and political literature. A "thoroughgoing analysis" it is, for it determines "the economic and political status of Europe at the present time," appraises "the probable effects of the international settlements (including reparations) that have recently been made," and suggests "in broad outlines an international policy such as it is believed the situation demands."

"The truth about the economic plight of the world," they affirm, "must be driven home to the masses of men and women everywhere. . . . Every one must be brought to realize that the world is vastly poorer than before the war and that nations cannot continue to live beyond their means without wrecking the economic organization of society. . . . This is not a task for statesmen alone; it calls for the determined support of the press and the pulpit in every land."

That nations have been spending too much money since the armistice and are continuing to spend too much money is the chief cause of the world's economic and political troubles, according to the coauthors of this volume. They are not pessimists, but they insist on the necessity of facing the worst. "It is not at all beyond the bounds of possibility that all of Continental Europe might in the course of the next twenty-five years, or even sooner, go the way that Russia has already gone."

The second part of the text is devoted to "The Reparations Dilemma" and brought to an end with two chapters on "Political Factors in the European Situation" that comprise the best historical summary of Europe's world war aftermath extant. And in the final part are set down and discussed "Remedies—Proposed and Real." The way Mr. Bass and Prof. Moulton see that nations must follow if they are to come out of the present situation with honor and credit to themselves and peace and prosperity to their peoples lies in these four basic requirements:

"First, domestic production must be increased in every country. Second, relatively unrestricted and balanced trade between nations must be re-established. Third, the gold standard must be restored. Fourth, the budgets of European countries must be balanced in the sense that expenditures do not exceed receipts from taxation. . . . These are the four outstanding requirements; it may safely be said that if these four things are secured the economic world as a whole will again be on its feet."

To achieve a real revival of industrial prosperity "agricultural purchasing power must be restored" through the agency of the reduction in the prices of "those groups of commodities which have thus far declined relatively little." A program of public works by Federal, State and municipal agencies would give an initial whirl to the "stalled industrial machine," but "without a restoration of international trade and without a balancing of budgets in European countries the stimulation of public works will accomplish relatively little." The cancellation of European Government debts to the United States is advocated as "good business" on economic and moral grounds, as is "the elimination of trade barriers in order to permit a resumption of normal buying and selling between nations. . . . We do not urge that absolute free trade between nations should immediately be established. But we do insist that the erecting of additional tariff barriers and trade restrictions at this time would result disastrously to the industries of all countries and that gradual reduction of duties everywhere would be enormously beneficial to all concerned." In brief, the moral of this admirable and enlightening volume is that the nations of the world should get together and get to work.

Humanly Good Essays

AND EVEN NOW. By Max Beerbohm. E. P. Dutton & Co.
THE MARGIN OF HESITATION. By Frank Moore Colby. Dodd, Mead & Co.
MORE TRIVIA. By Logan Pearsall Smith. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

MR. MAX BEERBOHM has outlived the time while his genius was unappreciated, if indeed he ever wallowed through such a period. Rather we must believe that he floated celestially from the very first, always tentative and deprecatory, with that splendid insolence of the unquestioning and unquestioned mastery of those who watched his pose—something like the Faun of the Capitol, or any bit of supremacy like that. (Is there any other like that?) Like Jimmy Whistler, he was not asking them, he was telling them.

His latest collection, called—with his own quivering lip of plaintive self-deprecation—"And Even Now," is illuminated with the same clear light of cool perception of men and things, the same elegant detachment from the diving urge toward saying anything in particular, so long as he says something decently and with great consideration for the opinions of his readers. He expresses himself; and if you think otherwise, at least that is no fault or concern of his. Of course, and nobody realizes it better than Max, he does not write now as he did when the first fine careless rapture bore him almost above the atmosphere. There is only one first time for anybody to hear "Rhinegold," or kiss a pretty girl, or write language in such pieces as "Diminuendo" or "A Defence of Cosmetics." Yet such succulent cropping is to be found in these new pages—about the veiled statue of King Humbert, for instance, or touching Mr. Desmond MacCarthy's definition of a Bohemian as one who would gladly use his razor for buttering his toast at breakfast, or his regrets at the untimely death of his great forebear, Michael Angelo—that he must be an ungentle and ungrateful reader who would expect double almonds in every fragile shell. And in the remarks upon "Hosts and Guests," surely the price of admission is thrice returned by that fragrant reminiscence of schoolboy days, the occasion when he got a hamper full of sausage rolls from home, and in the fortunate absence of any school fellow carried the box to his own room and ate all twelve of them himself, unseen by mortal eye.

Mr. Frank Moore Colby carries you along with him gladly upon his wave, and only occasionally does his tumult of words wash over your head. He confesses to fellowship with those who "never have any luck in picking up signs of the times," unlike such seers as Prof. Chuggs (something like his mislaid name), who called loudly, before the war, upon the world to "prepare for the coming cataclysm" and wrote a "hymn to moral rapidity" which "tossed systems of philosophy about like bran bags, hit off each classical writer in a phrase careless but final, was on familiar joking terms with all the sciences, explained woman, silenced history, summed up everything and everybody—the human race, the fathers of the church, genius, love, marriage and the future state." Examining such "new thinkers" as this one, Mr. Colby reaches the conclusion that "a new thinker is merely a man who does not know what other people have thought . . . a person who aspires to an eccentricity far beyond the limits of his nature."

Mr. Colby is not always pennate and ironical; sometimes he writes about literature and its practitioners like a chemist considering a formula. He states the presumable argument for the establishment of an American academy of arts and letters with skill and perspicacity and understanding, and then says it "all seems rather high flown and inconsistent with the probable attitude of these critics in their daily lives." Doubtless; but did a man's reach not exceed his grasp what were a heaven for? The academy is not heaven, but its aspiration is celestial enough; and Mr. Colby need not despise the day of small things on the "American Acropolis," as Mr. Hewitt, who was not personally so flamboyant, called it.

These collected pieces naturally lack the various pegs of circumstance on which they were hung, at their first appearance, but they are all sound and sensible, infused finely with the best and truest principles of art in the field of the written word. "Classic Debate," "The Choice of Bad Manners," "Pleasures of Anxiety," "Our Refinement"—all these and all the others are wise and witty and good for the use of edification.

The somewhat spotty nature of "Trivia"—published a year or two ago—did not prevent its gaining a fairly wide and generally enthusiastic following. The author, Mr. Logan Pearsall Smith, now starts another little ship on its journey. "More Trivia" has much the same quality as the first, and should accumulate a proportionately greater circle of readers and admirers. These irregular pieces have the unquestioned advantage of arbitrary existence; without ostensible or perceptible purpose they frequently stir up resistance in the reader's mind, but when he tries to look the author in the face he is up and away over the wall to the next page, where he is seen to be quite another person. The evident skill in writing these piquant scraps is fully balanced and supplemented, it would seem, by the skill of their arrangement in the pages of this highly entertaining little book.

W. S. M.